

2021 Somerville YIMBY City Council & Mayoral Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It will help us inform voters about you and help them understand what you want to do as an elected official in Somerville.

We have tried to keep the survey short and will focus mostly on housing policy issues.

What's your name? *

JT Scott

The City of Somerville needs more (check all that apply):

- Parking for cars
- Parks & green space
- Below-market-rate housing
- Market-rate housing
- Commercial & industrial spaces
- Other:
Public Housing, "Workforce Housing", Social Housing, and Community-Owned Housing (CLT)

How do you think about fitting these things in, and what neighborhoods would you prioritize placing them in?

I think we need green space everywhere, because currently we have it almost nowhere. Same for below-market rate housing, commercial development, and the rest - though obviously concentrating our efforts for density near existing-and-under-construction mass transit nodes makes sense right now.

During the pandemic, some street parking was repurposed for outdoor dining. Do you support keeping it that way permanently?

Yes

No

Do you think that the construction of new market-rate housing increases the price of housing for existing residents?

Yes

No

The city should respond to climate change by... (check all that apply)

- Switching city vehicles to electric where possible.
- Encouraging residents to use electric appliances instead of natural gas.
- Spending city money to encourage homeowners to make their homes more efficient.
- Working with the MBTA to enhance bus and train service.
- Building bike lanes and other street features that make it easier to get around without a car.
- Pricing parking to take into account the full cost of driving, including climate & health impacts.
- Building more housing, so that more people can live here instead of driving in from the suburbs.
- Other:

I think the amount of new housing construction in Somerville is...

- Too much
- About right
- Not enough

I think the amount of new commercial/business construction in the city is...

- Too much
- About right
- Not enough

The number of bike lanes in the city is...

- Too high
- About right
- Too low

Currently, the city does not require off-street parking for new buildings near transit. Should the city:

- Expand that policy citywide – new buildings should not be required to have off-street parking unless builders want it.
- Keep the policy the same.
- Reverse the policy – all new buildings should be required to include off-street parking.

The city is revising its charter, which sets the relationship between city council and the mayor, among other things. What's one thing you'd like to change?

Higher pay and staffing for City Councilors; legal representation for the City Council; increased budgetary authority to allocate funds to create positions and fund initiatives.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of Somerville residents rent their homes. What kinds of tenant protections should the city consider? (check all that apply)

- Allowing eviction only for specific causes.
- Sealing certain eviction records.
- Guaranteeing legal counsel to people who face eviction.
- Direct financial support for people who fall behind on rent.
- Increased funding for the office of housing stability.
- Rent stabilization, where the city sets a maximum percentage rent increase per year during a tenant's occupancy.
- Strict rent control, where the city sets a maximum rent increase per year, regardless of vacancy.
- Vacancy taxes or other ways to push landlords to find tenants.
- Other:

The city adopted a new zoning code in 2019, and has since made some revisions. What's one additional thing in the zoning code you'd like to see change in the next 2 years?

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One recent change to the city's zoning code was allowing larger buildings if the housing in them is entirely below-market-rate. What do you think about this rule?

- It goes too far and should be dialed back or removed
- It's about right
- We should expand it by allowing some extra density/height/size for buildings with 50% or 75% affordability
- We should expand it by allowing even more density/height/size for 100% affordable buildings
- Both C and D (expand to 50-75% affordable, and even more density for 100% affordable)

Should 2-family homes be allowed to add a third unit of market-rate housing by right (without special permits) in all Somerville neighborhoods?

- Yes
- No

Should it be possible to build a new triple-decker or 3-family home by right (without special permits) in the city's "Neighborhood Residence" areas?

- Yes
- No

Should we allow property owners to convert garages to housing or backyard cottages without applying for any special permits or variances?

Yes

No

What else should voters know about your approach to housing & development in Somerville?

I have left the last three questions blank because, fundamentally, opening all neighborhood 2-fams up to raw market rate expansion WITHOUT first putting into place extensive tenant protections and programs to prevent displacement is declaring "Open Season" on speculative real estate development to increase acquisition costs, gentrify rapidly, and displace current residents in a tsunami of capital seeking investment returns. Our current zoning actually is holding the line in the neighborhoods and reducing displacement pressures while still allowing for increased density near transit nodes as we organize and plan for future development without displacement. Until we can deploy stronger anti-displacement measures I do believe this is the right balance to be striking.

Do we need more supply? Sure. Do 6-story buildings inherently "destroy neighborhood character"? No. But HOW and WHERE and BY WHOM and AT WHAT COST - including the unintended consequences and knock-on effects in cultural displacement among others - means that the solution deserves a more serious approach than "just build more housing"; anti-displacement and anti-gentrification activists have been trying to say this for years, and we need to listen to that. As I've said before, housing is a segmented market and you can't solve a shortage of Toyota Corollas by just building a million Lamborghinis.

Cultural displacement is a real factor: fundamentally, people look around and say "this isn't my neighborhood anymore, why would I want to stay here?" The feeling that this city isn't a welcoming place for you any more, that you aren't cared for and supported, can be a cascading consequence of development - one of the visceral experiences of gentrification - and a direct result not only of the buildings that result from those developments but the new residents within (when they are majority higher-income) and the protracted impacts of construction that are borne by the existing residents. "Development without displacement" also means preserving a sense that the people who live here now still belong here in the future, and having neighborhood processes that shape development to include tangible benefits to the existing residents. It's a lot easier to endure construction and greet new neighbors with a warm welcome when the project is going to result in something you're pleased to live nearby, whether that's a project with expanded affordable housing, community space, green space, or any other amenity advocated for by the current residents of the neighborhood.

I'm proud of my record enabling commercial development in this city (and in my ward specifically), creating green space (3 new parks in 3 years), removing parking requirements, and creating interconnected and protected bicycle lane networks that also support mass transit and pedestrian safety in the ward.

This form was created inside of Somerville YIMBY.